Reconciliation Gestures aim to help re-build the loving parent – child relationship that may have become lost under the weight of the child’s difficult and challenging attitudes and behaviour.

When children do or say the right thing, we are often silent. When they do or say the wrong thing, we usually make a critical gesture or comment. We can learn to do or say a connecting action or comment when children do the right thing. In this way we focus on highlighting positive attitudes and behaviour instead of drawing attention only to problematic issues. Often we have to work very hard to find positive aspects. The four types of Reconciliation Gestures that follow help us with this search.

Useful tip: These RG’s should also be used regularly with siblings.

Important note: When we are looking to find more cooperation following reconciliation gestures, there are usually three stages: ‘no cooperation’ then ‘some cooperation with bad attitude’ before ‘cooperation with a better attitude’. At the stage of cooperation with bad attitude’ parents should remain silent, so as not to undo small seeds of change. Later, at a neutral time, a short subtle connecting comment may be offered about the cooperation with no criticism (at this early stage) about the attitude.

**Shared activities / Quality Time**
- Regular contact has been shown to increase parental presence, so it’s important to re-establish quality time, if this has been lost.

More information:
- When there are long term problems, many parents and children spend much of their time avoiding each other for fear of arguments and disagreements and also because they have lost their connection.
- This time should be for connecting only; no critical comments allowed at this stage. The time can be short from 10 minutes to a couple of hours. Often shorter periods are better to start with to lessen the chance of negativity or escalation taking place.

**Reflective Listening**
- Reflective listening is a way of listening that allows the child to talk without interruption for a few minutes.

More information:
- Reflective listening can be very helpful in helping to calm an angry or upset child. The intention is to help change the child’s mood, not mind.
- During a period of Reflective Listening, parents should not interrupt or offer solutions. They should try to show interest in a quiet and attentive way. Our ten tips handout will help get things started.
- It is not easy to reflectively listen, and upset children can often show anger and hostility. It works better if you can temporarily put your own feelings on hold while listening. It does become easier with practice!

**Connecting Comments**
- These are pre-planned connecting statements that help connections between parent and child to become re-established using the three ‘T’s - Timing (when to talk) Tone (how to talk) and Talk (what to say).

More information:
- There are six types of carefully planned appreciation or praise comments that are powerful conversational tools to improve the behaviour and attitude of children and young people.
- These comments, if practiced regularly, help to shift stuck patterns of negativity and criticisms that can take hold in many families when there are long-term challenges with children.
- We may bring in the idea of an imaginary magnifying glass to help ‘magnify’ past positive experiences or tiny current ones that are not easy to find. This may help to find strengths or positive attributes in our children (and ourselves).

**Connecting gestures**
- These are small gestures (also called acts of kindness) that show you care for your child.

More information:
- They are not rewards for good behaviour - they are offered despite problematic behaviour.
- They are given to help you re-connect to your child.
- They should be small and regular; not expensive or occasional.
- See ideas on the next page for a selection of kindness acts from parents on our NVR courses.

For Each of these Reconciliation / Re-connecting Gestures we have a handout to look at in your small groups!
What to expect:  
**From our children:**
- Immediate positive behaviour change (quite unusual, but not unheard of!).
- OR, Intermittent change in a ‘two steps forward, one step back’ way.
- OR, Behaviour becomes slightly worse before it gets better (sometimes called an ‘extinction burst’).
- Overtime, some children begin to offer reconciliation gestures to us!

**From ourselves:**
- As we become less entrenched in negative patterns, we can see a subtle change in our outlook, often in a ‘two steps forward, one step back’ way.
- It is very useful to practice using RG’s with your partner or other close person (e.g. your parent). When RG’s take place at the adult level, two things take place: (1) more appreciation and less negativity and (2) very helpful role modelling as children see adults working more cooperatively with each other.

Links to other NVR ideas

**De-escalation:** Remaining calm helps us to think about the use of RG’s. It’s very difficult to notice strengths and positives when we are angry or upset. Connecting comments and gestures are perhaps surprisingly very effective when given neutral times (‘cold iron’ moments).

**Parental Presence:** RG’s strongly promote Parental Presence – as children are more likely to hold our ideas in their mind when we connect with them very often.

**Baskets:** For RG’s we focus on the Rainbow basket (all the good things we see in our child) often using an imaginary magnifying glass. This basket grows in size over time.

**Supporters & Self Care:** RG’s help us to find support and to notice positive aspects of ourselves. When we are kind to others, in spite of issues, this often improves self-confidence.

**Active Resistance** (AR): This is the other side of the coin. All parenting involves Connection and Correction / Resistance. AR helps to address difficult issues in constructive, non-escalatory ways.

**Announcements:** These are written statements that can focus on positive as well as difficult issues. We may send a ‘positive announcement’ to highlight strengths and promote cooperation.

**Sit-ins:** This advanced NVR tool often blends connection and correction to further address difficult issues, as well as improvements taking place over time.

**Siblings:** As parents tell us, siblings often miss out. All these RG’s can and should be used regularly with siblings!

**Other uses:** RG’s can also be used with other adults, to promote positive relationships. e.g. including partners, ex-partners, grandparents, teachers, social workers, colleagues and bosses ...

A selection of Reconciliation Gestures (from our NVR parent courses)

- Text a nice message
- Send and e-card or a card through the post
- Leave messages for him around the house to find
- Prepare a meal together
- Buy favourite biscuits, dessert, drink
- Cook their favourite meal
- Spend individual time with them
- Ask about her day
- Remember to tell him/her “I love you”
- Give praise for a task ‘well done’
- Say “sorry” if I’ve sounded irritable

Further reading: for more theoretical underpinning about these ideas see *Non Violent Resistance Innovations in practice*. Chapter 18: Expanding reconciliation gestures & active resistance with connecting & resisting comments. Available to download at www.oxleas.nhs.uk/nvr